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## CONFESSIONS OF A MISSIONARY-JOURNALIST

by Jim Stentzel

Jim Stentzel, a journalist by profession and a missionary by calling, has been co-editor of JCAN since May, 1973. Next week he will return to the U.S. for a one-year furlough. After much brow-beating by the other co-editors, he agreed to share some reflections about foreign reporting and about the domestic press in Japan. His "sayonara" observations follow. ---Eds.

As most of the several hundred regular members of Tokyo's Press Club will testify, being a foreign correspondent in Japan is a very mixed bag: sometimes exasperating and demoralizing; sometimes exciting and rewarding. For church-related correspondents--of which the Press Club has two--the task of trying to report and explain Japan to the rest of the world is both easier (we don't have to describe the emperor's clothes or report the day's dollar-yen fluctuations) and harder ("Did you say you represent the *United Methodist Church*?!!?"--Foreign Ministry spokesman; or "My God--or can I say that?--I've never met a *Christian* here before"--Press Club Old Guard).

Part of the attraction of being a foreign correspondent in Japan is the almost awesome sense of responsibility, power and independence that comes with the assignment. Back home, most of us (98%) men and (2%) women would be one among several dozen clogs in a newsroom machine, filing the day's top murder story with a crotchety, cigar-chomping city editor. There it's office politics; here it's tea ceremonies. There it's the police beat; here it's often sole responsibility for covering 112 million Japanese--and, usually, 50 million Koreans, several hundred million Southeast Asians, and 800 million Chinese as well.

Now, that's awesome. That gives us our sense of value and, if we're honest, our sense of incompetence. On this point, being a Christian journalist is helpful: since others expect us to be incompetent until proven otherwise, sometimes it's easier for us to be humble about our work. The secular professionals have to appear competent all the time, even when they aren't.

The traps of reporting on Japan are infinite. The first mistake is thinking we understand what the spokesman said in Japanese. The second mistake is believing what the official translator said the spokesman said in Japanese. Then there's the problem of quoting what the Kyodo wire service said the translator said the spokesman said in Japanese.

I know only four foreign correspondents who are "fluent" in Japanese, but they too have aged quickly in the process. In fact, most correspondents have grey hair. Many of them, it seems, came to Japan with MacArthur in 1945. Some of the American correspondents think they still occupy Japan. But even the younger correspondents, including this one, carry around the 100 cubic feet of duty-free

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# CONFESSIONS (cont'd)

Western mind-set and bias which the home office allows each reporter to ship to Japan. The good correspondents, sometimes slowly and painfully, learn to store this cultural baggage before pronouncing judgement on Japanese people and institutions. The best reporters--unfortunately, a rare breed today--develop both a critical and an affirmative eye towards Japanese things.

Though having been in Japan for 4 1/2 years, I have not yet succeeded in fine-tuning this combined critical/affirmative eye. It was remarkably easy during my first years here to get on a hobby-horse and lambaste the Japanese for their wicked perversions of democracy and a free press. During this period, U.S. editors especially liked my writing.

Then followed a period during which Japan began looking like the "Promised Land" and the U.S. like Sodom and Gomorrah: Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers, Nixon, Watergate, the CIA. With the addition of the oil crisis and the world-wide recession, the Americans seemed not only to despise Asians and fear Arabs but also not even to like themselves very much. I was impressed with the very different Japanese reaction to economic crisis and post-Vietnam Asian developments. The events, much more potentially devastating to Japan than to the U.S., were greeted by the Japanese people and press with a sense of relative calm, confidence and adaptability. What was "doomsday" in the U.S. was another challenge in Japan. My articles during this period didn't go over well in the U.S.

A more internationalized or bi-cultural person perhaps could avoid these easy lapses into extremes of black and white; a more mature reporter could avoid letting news judgment slide into judgmentalism. It's too easy to refer to Japan's "island mentality" without mentioning U.S. parochialism. Correspondents have a duty to report the dangers of right-wing militarism, Constitutional circumvention, government "dirty tricks" and economic imperialism in Japan, but not irrespective of U.S. leaders who have championed these same causes. We have to develop the critical ability to see the speck in others' eyes *and* the log in our own. We have to know the limits of our experience and vision even as we push those limits. This is the basis for a critical/affirmative eye.

Some of the major difficulties of foreign correspondents--too big an area to cover, minimal language skills, and cultural baggage--have been referred to. But there are others. One is that most of the Tokyo-based foreign correspondents stay in Japan either just a year or two (not long enough to really affirm it) or they stay for a life-time (and lose their critical eye). Another problem is that they are all based in Tokyo; they have to work mostly with the Japanese government and business elites, and this leaves little time for one-person bureaus to get into the larger society of human interest and investigative reporting. One of the serious gaps here is in coverage of social concerns and minority issues.

I believe that one of the mission imperatives of the Japanese church and foreign missionaries here is to fill these communication gaps. Responsible Christian citizenship, after all, requires a basic knowledge and understanding of the multifaceted world in which we live. Periodic visits and furloughs of missionaries to their home countries are not a sufficient witness to one world in Christ. I believe that communication, in the broadest sense of that word, requires a much higher priority in the mission task. By background, training and commitment, missionaries are in an ideal position to transcend the limitations of most foreign correspondents in Japan. Only in one area do I see any real parallel between the limitations of missionaries and correspondents: that of living and working here so long that the "critical eye" is lost.

Let me conclude with some comments on Japan's vernacular press. On the one hand, what is said in Japanese media is of the highest quality anywhere in the

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CONFESSIONS (cont'd)

world. The quantity of international news available, and the quality of the economic reporting in particular, reflects a more sophisticated reading public than in the U.S. On the other hand, what is *not* said in Japanese media could fill many best-selling books: news from Korea, for example, and domestic scandals of many varieties. The Japanese mass media, to the frustration especially of younger reporters, are basically a powerful wing of the Establishment. In most cases, what government and business interests don't want said, doesn't get said.

There are occasional exceptions to this: when cover-ups are uncovered by foreigners with status; and when one political faction or party "leaks" stories to discredit another faction or party. For example, most Japanese reporters have known for years that (1) former Prime Minister Kishi has been involved in a long string of shady deals in south Korea; and (2) the U.S. military has regularly and illegally brought nuclear weapons into Japanese ports. These stories were not "news", however, until they were broken with Washington date-lines. Combined with recognized names (Harvard's Professor Cohen and Admiral LaRocque, respectively) both stories were front-paged in Japan last year.

Even former Prime Minister Tanaka's scandals (exposed in an LDP factional "leak" to a Japanese monthly in 1974) did not make it into the Japanese dailies until foreign correspondents pressed the matter with Tanaka at a Press Club luncheon. With this foreign press legitimization, the lid was off the pot, the Japanese people's right-to-know was assured, and the Tanaka Cabinet was forced to resign.

These examples show the tremendous power of the foreign press which can be used or abused. Judging from reactions of Japanese people, that power was more used than abused in the above cases. I can't help feeling deeply sorry for Japanese reporters, though, who rely on and thank foreigners for saying what the Japanese know and wish they could print. By serving as their crutches, we correspondents are hardly contributing to the development of freedom of speech and access to information in Japan.

\* \* \* \* \*

JAPAN SALVATION ARMY CELEBRATES 80TH ANNIVERSARY

Since 14 Salvation Army missionaries arrived in Japan from England in 1895 the unique work of the Salvation Army has contributed remarkably to society through practical action-oriented work among the people. The name of Yamamuro Gunpei, Shoshisha graduate, became well-known among the common folk because of his easy-to-understand preaching and pioneer work in social welfare. In 1900 successful action for liberation and protection of young women from public prostitution made the rest of the world recognize the work of the Salvation Army.

Ever since, their multi-faceted work among people at the bottom of society has continued. No other private institution has reached the levels of the socially oppressed people through such a well-organized system based on wide public support. Every year when the Salvation Army kettles hang in the streets pleading for a year-end contribution for the poor, all of us who participate in similar causes will remember well their 80 years work in Japan.

--- Aiko Carter

\* \* \* \* \*

Last year the Sankei Newspaper surveyed 1000 Japanese about their attitude toward the celebration of Christmas. Eating Christmas cake, putting up decorations, and other Christmas activities are performed by over 60% of those questioned. Of these 82.8% held home parties. Only 17.3% thought it was foolish for non-Christians to celebrate Christmas, and 70.7% thought it good to experience a happy feeling at Christmas. (Tosei News)



WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

by Yoshiko Isshiki

*A non-government women's meeting was covered by Aiko Carter (JCAN #486, November 28, 1975). Many of Japan's most "establishment" women's organizations were represented at both meetings, although some people boycotted the government conference in protest of the Emperor's participation. Ms. Isshiki is chairperson of the NCC Women's Committee. ---Eds.*

The Assembly of Japanese Women's Affairs was held on Nov. 5-6 in Tokyo under the joint sponsorship of the Japanese government and the United Nations. Entitled "Equality Between Men and Women: Women's Social Participation," the conference was addressed by the Emperor, Prime Minister Miki, and Japanese Diet member Ms. Fusae Ichikawa. Ms. Helvi Sipila, UN coordinator of International Women's Year (IWY) stressed in her speech that, "women must try to solve our own problems without waiting for someone else to do it."

Two afternoon symposiums featured mixed panels of well-known Japanese anthropologists, professors and writers along with "average housewives." Unfortunately one panel was chaired by a man, which seemed unnecessary.

Over lunch Ms. Sipila commented, "It is marvelous that the Emperor and Empress were present. That by itself symbolizes how seriously Japan is taking up women's problems." Meanwhile, outside the hotel, young activist women demonstrated against the government-sponsored IWY assembly and the presence of the Emperor, saying that these two institutions are among the biggest obstacles to liberation of women here in Japan.

\* \* \* \* \*

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

As I read in the November 13 issue of JCAN of the increased torture of the Catholic poet, Kim Chi Ha, and of the difficulties and pressures of the Christians in Korea, my first impulse was to write to them and to reassure them that we are aware of their plight and that we are praying for them. Fortunately before I had time to write I was cautioned by God that such a tangible expression might only be used to hurt them more.

Expressions of encouragement when coming from strangers means a great deal, yet it can be costly too. The real support and encouragement for these brothers and sisters in Christ that is all blessing and without cost is our prayers that God will be fully present to them and they to God. The most direct and instantaneous contact I can have with Kim Chi Ha is through prayer. In spirit I can sit beside Kim Chi Ha in his solitary prison cell and, I believe, he will be encouraged and comforted because we fellowship together with Christ...the three of us in the Korean prison cell.

My prayers welled up for the Korean Christians that they might experience Christ's presence in a way those of us in less traumatic circumstances will never know.

But then I stopped...and realized that Christ *is* fully present to the Korean Christians and also to the rest of us. The difference is that under stress the Korean Christians are making themselves more fully present to Christ.

It is us who need prayer...that in our restlessly active superficial condition we will awaken to the ever present Christ and become present to Him.

My prayer for Christians everywhere is that we will understand the presence

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LETTER (cont'd)

of God when he seems most hidden.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Kroon Holmgren  
(Minnesota, U.S.A.)

We would like to thank Ms. Holmgren for her letter. She has expressed something which we all feel deeply, and unfortunately seldom take the time to say.

We all work under the constant fear that something we do with the intention of helping the Korea situation may actually be the cause of further suffering there. However, after much thought and consultation we are urging people to write in support of the Korean Christians. An international campaign is now underway to express support for Kim Chi Ha by mail during the Christmas season.

Although these letters will probably not reach him, they will convey to the south Korean government the deep international concern over Kim Chi Ha's case. Letters should be addressed to:

Kim Chi Ha  
Westgate Prison  
Seoul, South Korea

It would be helpful to send copies to local Korean Consulates and to Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the UN, United Nations Building, New York, N.Y.

---Eds.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CHURCH SUPPORTS STRIKE BY HANDICAPPED

A mini-Christmas story from Tokyo, complete with happy ending ...

Workers at the Okubo Bottle Company are celebrating a victorious conclusion to their "bonus struggle." It's not an isolated occurrence; about now union members all over Japan pin on arm bands and urge their companies to make the traditional year-end bonus a little more generous. Usually the companies agree, although this year with economic gloom widespread, the increase may be only a token.

The Okubo Bottle Company story, however, runs deeper. The company carries 65 mentally retarded and 41 physically handicapped persons on its total payroll of 180, and in 1963 was commended by the Ministry of Labor as a model for employment of the handicapped. The company receives a government subsidy for employing handicapped workers.

The discrepancy shows up particularly at bonus-time. On top of smaller monthly salaries, physically and mentally handicapped workers were scheduled to receive about one month's salary as a bonus, rather than the two months' bonus scheduled for non-handicapped workers. Furthermore, the mentally handicapped workers have traditionally been excluded from membership in the company union because the management felt they were unable to understand the significance of union actions and might be exploited by union officials.

Several workers in the company felt this was unjust. They formed a new union calling for equality of treatment for all employees. And workers demanded that the company pay equivalent bonuses to all workers. To force the management to recognize the new union, they called a strike.

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CHURCH (cont'd)

Several factors complicated the situation. The bottle company maintains a special dormitory for its retarded employees, and the new union members felt awkward about striking for equal treatment while remaining in their non-equal dormitories. It seemed like a prior admission of the validity of the company's "protection" policy. A Christian employee and member of the neighborhood Horikiri Church (Kyodan) approached the Rev. Hiroshi Saito with the union's dilemma, and as a result the strikers moved into temporary quarters in Horikiri Church on December 2. The following Sunday the church elders pledged their support. The strike was an issue of human rights, elders said, and offered the union use of the church for a longer period.

A Christian lawyer offered advice, but it was not needed. On December 8 the company recognized the new labor union and settled the strike. Management agreed to take no disciplinary action against strike leaders, to pay all employees two months bonus, to continue negotiations about improving the working atmosphere, and to treat the new union "with sincerity," to negotiate in good faith.

"The victory was a result of public support," the Rev. Saito says. He credited nation-wide news coverage of the story in the Japanese press as a contributing factor in the quick settlement.

(Akiko Yamaguchi)

\* \* \* \* \*



Merry Christmas.

The sky is gray, persimmons glow orange, and department stores reverbrate to "Jingle Bells" and recorded Santa Claus laughter as the Year of the Rabbit in Japan draws to a close. Time again to say thank you to all the people who work behind the JCAN scenes. Thanks to typist Hikari Ii, journalists' rough drafts become clean, correctly spelled stencils, and thanks to Mavis Hindman they get proofread. Chikatsu Yazaki assures that we don't overspend our budget, and Toshiaki Kusunoki translates. Eiko Metoki keeps everything from subscription renewals to the printing machine running, and she and Keiko Mizuhara have folded and enveloped miles of JCAN. A very special thanks goes to Cathy Stentzel, for her yearly JCAN index. And thanks to all of our readers who have shared their suggestions and criticisms over the year. May the Year of the Dragon be a happy one for you all!



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